

Persuasive Writing Module

Overview

Content

How can students use the art of persuasion in writing?

Process

- Lesson One: **"Baiting the Hook"**
How Persuasion Works
- Lesson Two: **"Casting for an Audience"**
The Art of Persuasive Letters and Essays
- Lesson Three: **"Hook, Line and Sinker"**
Understanding the Tools of Persuasion and Implementing a Persuasive PR Campaign

Objectives

- To examine the persuasive techniques used in public relations campaigns (i.e. letters, essays, press releases, press advisories, editorials, etc.)
- To analyze and interpret how persuasive techniques convey a position
- To identify the audience, purpose and goals for persuasion
- To brainstorm ideas related to environmental issues (students involved with Cyberways and Waterways® are encouraged to write about their experiences--findings and awards--with the project)
- To plan, draft, revise, edit and proof a persuasive letter, essay, press release or press advisory
- To distribute the persuasive document to media (i.e. the school newspaper, a local newspaper or television station, etc.)
- To document all media coverage

Note

The student(s) with the most extensive media coverage is eligible to participate in the Cyberways and Waterways® online chat, May 2, 2001, with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Please send media clippings by April 1, 2001, to:

4empowerment.com
Steve Amos
1607 Waterston
Austin, TX 78703
(512) 469-7447

You can also email your documentation of media coverage to steve@4empowerment.com

Persuasive Lesson #1
"Baiting the Hook"**Academic Question**

How does a writer use persuasion to promote an idea or a product?

Objective(s)

To develop an awareness of the language of persuasion
To examine the use of persuasive techniques

Process (Activities):

1. Have students bring in an editorial from the newspaper (local daily or the *New York Times*) or a letter to the editor from a news magazine, such as *Newsweek* or *Time*. Have students read the editorial/letter to the editor and answer the questions from "Checklist for Responding to Persuasive Appeals." (See attachment.)
2. In groups, have students share their editorials/letters to the editor and their analyses. Then have them select one of these to present to the class. During the presentations, have them focus on the audience, the purpose and the evidence. At this point with older students, you might discuss the fallacies that exist in the writer's logic.
3. Next, have students reexamine the editorials or letters, looking at the ways writers use "comparison and contrast" and/or "cause and effect" as the major structure of their persuasion.
4. Finally, have students point out the persuasive tools being used (i.e., the bandwagon effect).

Product / Application

Have students complete an individual analysis of another editorial/letter to the editor, one that you have selected. They should identify the audience, the purpose, the major structure (comparison/contrast or cause/effect) and the persuasive tools. Then they should analyze how emotional and logical appeals are used to persuade.

Assessment / Evaluation

Create a rubric that judges the effectiveness of the students' understanding of persuasive techniques.

Conclusion

Use this lesson as a springboard into students' own persuasive writing -- letters, essays or editorials.

Resources

"Analyzing a Persuasive Document"

"Checklist for Responding to Persuasive Appeals"

This curriculum was developed with education grant funds through the Texas Education Agency for nonprofit educational uses and cannot be sold or used for profit in any way.

Side Bar

Time Frame: 3-5 days, depending on age group

Grade Level: 6-12

TEKS:

Analyzing Persuasive Documents

1. What audience is the document directed to?
2. What does the document want the reader to do or believe?
3. Does the document encourage anything that may be harmful to mental or physical health?
4. Does the document try to get readers to believe or do something society considers "good"?
5. Does the document appeal to the emotions? What specific words are used for this purpose?
6. Does the document use factual information to persuade the audience? If so, what is it?
7. Are you persuaded by the document? Would you do what it suggests? Why?

Adapted from *The Writer's Choice* (blue level)

Checklist for Responding to Persuasive Appeals

1. What am I being asked to believe, do, or support?
2. What evidence is necessary to support the claims?
3. Has the evidence been presented fairly?
4. Do I have all the evidence I need? If not, where can more evidence be gathered?
5. Am I responding to a persuasive appeal rather than evaluating the evidence and reasoning presented and forming my own judgment?
6. What are other possible points of view? Are any of these more valid than the point of view presented?
7. Am I being asked to do something that goes against what I believe, know to be the truth, or hope to achieve?
8. Do I need to consult other people or authoritative sources before I make a decision?

The Writer's Craft (yellow level) McDougal, Littell 1995

Persuasive Lesson #2
"Casting for an Audience"

Academic Question

How can students express their own views on controversial issues through the art of persuasion?

Objective(s)

To analyze and interpret how persuasive techniques convey a position
 To identify the audience, purpose and goals for persuasion
 To plan, draft, revise, edit and proof a persuasive letter, press release and/or an opinion editorial (argumentative essay) about an environmental issue

Process (Activities)

1. Have students explore various issues they might write about persuasively. They might consider issues that they see as important to their lives at school or outside of school, but try to have them focus on local or regional issues. Have them look at the local newspaper, watch the local news, check out local Web sites if available, local political campaigns. Suggest that students consider local environmental issues. (Students involved in Cyberways and Waterways? are encouraged to write about their experiences-- findings and awards--with their projects.)
2. Have students work in small groups or as a class to compile a list or lists of controversial issues. [If you would like to have the entire class focused on a single issue, you might then have the class vote on the issue they would most like to pursue.]
3. Once the students have selected an issue to pursue, they should begin to research the issue -- collecting articles, interviewing or surveying people, looking for facts, statistics and anecdotes about the issue.
4. Have students free write about the issue, examining their own opinions. [If the class is working on the same issue, this would be a good time to have them share ideas.]
5. Have students list possible opposing arguments to their positions.
6. Discuss with students what strategies they could use to present their position whether they should use a "comparison/contrast" or "cause/effect" structure for their writing.
7. At this point, students should be ready to start writing their first draft. The following recommendations allow for a variety of assignments based on what might be most appropriate for specific grade levels:
 - 6th-8th: letter to the editor (newspaper)
 - 9th-10th: letter to a government agency or a company
 - 11th-12th: argumentative essay
8. Once students have their first draft completed, have them complete some or all of the following revision strategies:

- a. Give students small post-it notes. Have them exchange papers with a partner. The partner should read the paper and write 4 comments --two on ideas they believe, and two on ideas they doubt -- posting the notes on the paper.
 - b. Have students write for 10 minutes from the opposing viewpoint or from the person to whom the letter is written. After completing the revision, have students check to see if their papers contain any weaknesses pointed out from the opposing side.
 - c. Have students use a person's or group's story they discovered in their research who have experienced the problem they are addressing in their argument. Have them write about this person or group in story form. This may serve as an anecdote to be included as support for the argument.
 - d. In writing groups, have each student tell (verbalize) to the group what their argumentation letter/essay is about. The writing group members should write down what the writer has shared in the dictation. Then the writer should read the actual letter or essay aloud to the members and the writers and the members should compare the two versions -- the verbal version and the written version -- and discuss how the two versions might be integrated. (For example see, *Deep Revision* p. 108)
 - e. Ask students to bring two different color highlighters to use in recognizing effective use of persuasive language. First, with one color have students highlight language that they believe is particularly persuasive, words that strongly portray or support their positions. Then with the other color have students highlight words or phrases that convey a negative tone towards the audience, words that have a negative connotation or phrases that are condescending. If students find they have very few of the first color, they should consider adding stronger word choices. If students find they have an abundance of the second color, they should replace those with more convincing words.
9. After completing several or all of the revision strategies, students should now write a second draft.
 10. Students should read their second drafts aloud to themselves and to a group. They should use the following questions for themselves and for the group to answer:
 - Did I say what I wanted to say or did I get sidetracked into some other area?
 - Did I meet the opposition's objections, or did I simply state my own case and pretend there was no other side?
 - If this were someone else's paper, would I be convinced?
 - Which of my arguments did you find most convincing? Which did you find least convincing?
 - Can you think of additional arguments to support my point of view?
 - Are there arguments against my point of view that I haven't considered? (*McDougall, Littell* p. 216)
 Where indicated by questions, students should make corrections as needed.
 11. Lead students through basic editing techniques, focusing on punctuation, spelling and grammar.
 12. Students should write their final copy.

Product / Application

Depending on the grade level taught, students should present their persuasive argument as the final draft of one of the following: letter to the editor (newspaper or appropriate magazine), letter to government agency or a company, or an argumentative essay.

Assessment / Evaluation

Create a rubric to evaluate student's product. (See attached Web site link for creating rubrics)

Conclusion

Student products can now be added to student portfolios. The ideas presented and discussed can be used as a springboard to implementing a PR campaign on a controversial issue.

Resources / Comments / Feedback

Deep Revision by Meredith Sue Willis

After the End by Barry Lane

Writer's Craft (blue level) by McDougal, Littell 1995

Side Bar

Time frame: 3-4 weeks

Grades: 6-12

Teacher Tips

Rubrics: www.odyssey.on.ca/~elaine.coxon/rubrics.htm

TEKS:

Persuasive Lesson #3 **"Hook, Line and Sinker"**

Academic Question

How can students communicate their own views on controversial issues to the school newspaper of local media outlet?

Objective(s)

To revise their final persuasive document to send to the local media outlet(s) of their choice

To garner media coverage in local, statewide or national media outlet(s)

To present their issue to a community group or civic organization

Process (Activities)

1. Review business letter formatting for students whose original document was not in persuasive letter format.
2. Have students work in small groups to examine various persuasive documents used in press release campaigns. (see attached examples)
3. Once the students have selected document(s) they wish to distribute, they should begin to research and list the local media outlets, reporters and editors that might be most appropriate for their message(s). (Consult "How to Contact the Media.") You might consider the following recommendations for specific grade levels:
 - 6th-8th : school newspaper
 - 9th-10th: local television station or community newspaper
 - 11th-12th: major newspaper in the area or statewide/national magazine
4. Have students write a formal business letter to persuade the reporter/editor to cover a story on the group's issue. The letter should accompany the group's final persuasive document.
5. Have students send and/or fax the persuasive documents and accompanying letters to reporters and editors.
6. Have students call and/or email the reporter/editor to follow up on the persuasive document (with teacher supervision).
7. Have students contact community groups or civic organizations, such as the local senior citizens home or the Lions Club, and present their project/issue. Be sure to alert the media of this event with a press advisory (see attachment).

Product / Application

Depending on the grade level taught, students should present their final persuasive document to at least one of the following: school newspaper, local television or radio station, major newspaper, appropriate magazine, community group or civic organization.

Assessment / Evaluation

The students should be scored on how effectively they communicate their views with the community (through the media, PTA, school newspaper, community group or

civic organization). Consider developing a rubric with your students detailing what elements comprise an effective PR campaign.

Conclusion

Student media clippings can be added to student portfolios and submitted to 4 Empowerment.com to be considered for participation in the May 3, 2001, live Web chat with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Resources

attachments:

"How to Contact the Media"

"Press Advisory Template"

sample PR documents

Side Bar

Time frame: 2 weeks

Grades 6-12

Rubrics: www.odyssey.on.ca/~elaine.coxon/rubrics.htm

TEKS:

How to Contact the Media

Do you have a school newspaper, magazine or yearbook? Get the name of the editor and staff sponsor. Send the persuasive document to both of these people.

Contact your school district's public relations or community affairs representative. If there is a district newsletter that goes to parents and community members, suggest that an article be included on your issue.

Talk to your school's PTA newsletter editor about writing a story.

What are the community (weekly) newspapers in your area? Daily newspapers? Local television stations? Local radio stations? Call and ask for the names of the reporters who are responsible for the local school, education or technology stories. Send your final persuasive document and accompanying letter (grades 9-12 only send persuasive letter) addressed specifically to these reporters. Be sure also to send the persuasive document to the attention of the newspaper editor or television/radio station news director or assignment editor.

Check out your community newspaper's Opinions/Editorial section, or Op-Ed page. Who are the local columnists (not nationally-syndicated ones from elsewhere) and what are the subjects of their columns? Do they write about the community, business, politics, technology? Is there an angle to your issue that would provide interesting material for any of their columns?

What are the local television stations? Target the state assignment editor or the producer of your local morning news show, evening news show or news magazine about doing an in-depth piece on your issue.

In many communities, there is a local cable television station that gives time to schools to provide information or activities. Have someone videotape your group discussing the issue and submit it.

Are there local radio talk shows in your city or town? Talk with the show's producer to get him or her interested in interviewing your group.

Take your show on the road by visiting a local Senior Citizens center to talk with them about your issue. Alert the media in advance by sending them a press advisory (see attachment).

Press Advisory Template

(to alert the media about an event)

Print your final copy on a sheet of your school's letterhead.

PRESS ADVISORY

Contact:

[School contact person]

[School name]

[Contact phone number]

Headline: Tell what your group is doing. If it is an environmental issue, mention that it is a part of Cyberways and Waterways®.

School Name Discusses (Issue)

First Paragraph: Include your city, state and the date in your "dateline." Then briefly tell who, what, when, where and why.

Second Paragraph: Give a little background information about the project. (Why you chose your issue. If this is an environmental issue, mention Cyberways and Waterways®.) Tell how many students are involved.

Third Paragraph: Highlight the date and time of the event so that the media will know where and when to attend. Also include a contact person's name and phone number the media can call for more information.